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REPRODUCTIONS OF CRETAN
POTTERY

AMONG the many gifted craftsmen of Crete the potters occupy a prominent place. Their work is essentially original, not borrowed from other nations, and their imagination and decorative sense are of a very high order. To us their products appeal not only for their intrinsic beauty but for their novelty. The vases of Egypt, of classical

the effective way in which they have been utilized, and also at the kinship they show between our taste and that of the Cretans of three and four thousand years ago. It is not surprising that modern decorators are already realizing their opportunities and are borrowing Cretan shapes and motives.

Since it is impossible to obtain originals, or at least fine originals, of this Cretan pottery, the Museum has ordered a number of reproductions of important specimens of different periods made by M. Gilliéron of

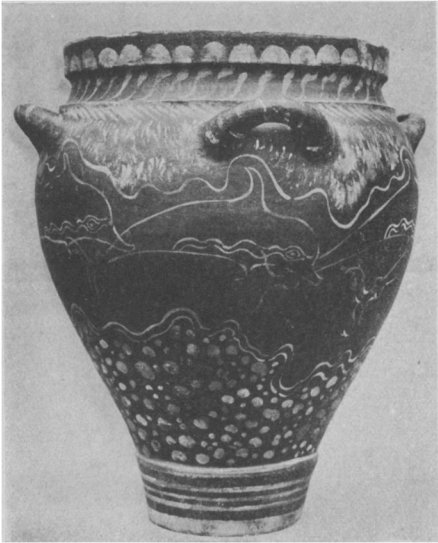


FIG. 1. JAR FROM PACHYAMOS, CRETE
ABOUT 1800-1600 B. C.

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MUSEUM OF PHILADELPHIA

Greece, of China, and of many other countries have been long familiar to us, and we have copied them and commercialized them for several generations; but these Cretan pots were safely buried out of sight for more than three thousand years, and we of the twentieth century are the first to see them again. Moreover, Cretan pottery makes a direct appeal. No historical or archaeological knowledge is necessary to understand it. The leaves, flowers, and sea-animals, the spirals, rosettes, and other beautiful patterns used as decorations tell their own story, and we can only marvel at

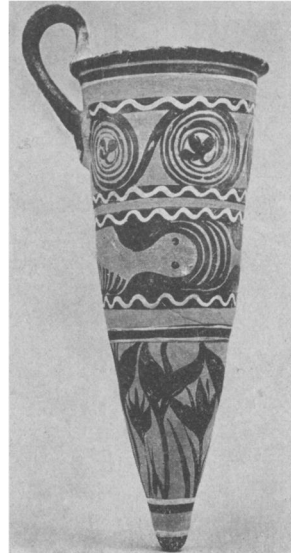


FIG. 2. FILLER FROM GOURNIA
ABOUT 1600-1500 B. C.

Athens. During the last three years a number of these reproductions have been acquired and placed on exhibition. A new set, which has just arrived, is now shown for the first time in the Room of Recent Accessions. Most remarkable are the three large jars (heights, $20\frac{5}{8}$, $20\frac{3}{4}$, $24\frac{5}{8}$ in.) from Richard B. Seager's excavations at Pachyamos, Crete. They were unearthed only two years ago and will shortly be published by the excavator in the Anthropological Publications of the University Museum of Philadelphia. Like the similar vessels from Mochlos, Pseira, and Sphoungaras, these jars were used for burials, being part of a large cemetery in which over two

hundred such vases were brought to light. Originally, however, we may suppose that they were used for storing purposes. The ornamentation—painted in white on a brown background—shows the combination of freedom and distinction which is characteristic of the period known as the Third Middle Minoan (about 1800-1600 B. C.). Especially fine is the decoration on one of the vases of a school of dolphins swimming in the sea (fig. 1). In making each slightly overlap the one behind it the artist has

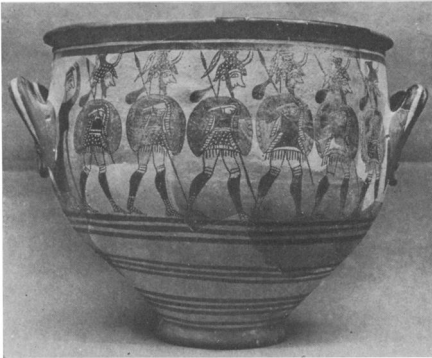


FIG. 3. THE WARRIOR VASE
FROM MYCENAE

conveyed in a charmingly lifelike manner the idea of dolphins following one another.

The four "fillers" which have been added to our collection are likewise characteristic examples of Cretan pottery. Their decorations are strongly naturalistic, and present many of the Cretan vegetable and marine motives, rendered in the delicate style of the Late Minoan I period (about 1600-1500 B. C.). Two of the vases were found at Gournia¹ (see fig. 2), one at Pseira,² and one at Aghia Triadha. The shape, which varies from the conical to the rounded, is a favorite one in Crete; but its purpose is not quite certain. An important feature is the hole at the bottom, with which all such vases are provided. Cretan archaeologists generally refer to them as

¹See Hawes, Gournia, pl. XVII, 27 and 32.

²See Seager, Pseira, p. 29, fig. 10.

strainers, or fillers, or drinking horns; and it has been suggested that they were used for a religious purpose, like that of sprinkling holy water in the Roman Catholic Church. They certainly must have played a part in some functions of the palace life of the period, for they figure frequently in the great procession scenes in the wall-paintings of Knossos and Thebes.

The last vase we have to describe is the famous "Warrior" vase found by Schliemann in Mycenae in 1876. It is of an entirely different character from the vases just discussed, and represents the latest stage of Minoan pottery as evolved on the Greek mainland. Instead of the usual sea and vegetable motives, human figures are used for the decoration. On one side are depicted six warriors setting out for battle, with a woman looking after them in an attitude of lamentation (fig. 3). On the other side are five warriors advancing with spears ready for the throw. We may interpret these as the attacking enemy against whom the other warriors have been called out. To us, of course, these representations seem very crude; and the warriors with their long noses and enormous eyes look like caricatures. But we must remember the circumstances. If the Cretans or Mycenaeans had chosen to represent the human figure on their vases at the period when their art was in its prime, we should probably have had scenes as beautiful as their wall-paintings; but the impulse to represent men and women on pottery came when their art was in its most decadent stage; so that artistically these figures are on a low level. What is important to remember, however, is the fact that this introduction of human subjects on pottery proved a turning-point in Greek ceramic history. Henceforth scenes with human figures remained in the repertoire of potters, first occupying a minor place, but gradually growing more important, until at the time of the next great artistic era of Greek art they became the exclusive theme.

G. M. A. R.